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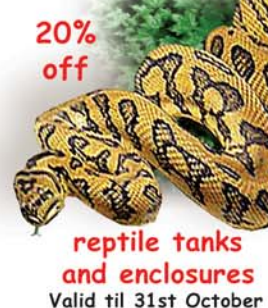
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Cuisine de Critters

By Phil Tripp (Pet Chef)



The more you read and research on nutrition for your pets, the more you're exposed to myths, lies, conjecture and sensationalism. But whether you're using the net or doing your homework by hitting the books on feeding pets, a few home truths do come through.

I'm not going into it here, but it's no secret that the lower end of the scale of canned pet food contain 'meat by-products', 'meat meal', preservatives and artificial additives. There's no shortage of evidence of how badly pet food can be manufactured without labelling of ingredients (it is not mandatory and the food industry has opposed it) and there's too much gut wrenching proof of where the meat comes from. This is one of many reasons why pet owners are turning more to premium and superpremium foods or making their own.

We've always been careful in our choice of dry food or kibbles and have tried about six brands. We have actually read the ingredients, checked the balance of protein, fat and carbohydrates and noted the sources of meats and grains used. In the case of grains, soy, corn, corn gluten and wheat gluten are often used as sources of protein but for some dogs are hard to digest. In the case of meats, chicken meal is acknowledged as the best as poultry meal can mean

any kind of bird. Meat by products can include intestines, feet, bones and rendered fats.

The two brands we have chosen as preferred kibbles (which is only one component of a varied feeding diet) we won't reveal as it's specific to our animals and we don't want to be seen as endorsing any products. But in making your decision, be aware that virtually all of the superpremium brands have toll free numbers to call for advice and you can be very specific in questions you have about contents of the foods and benefits. The two brands we chose both had excellent responses and we got calls back from their in-house vet within an hour of asking very curly questions. We already knew the answers, but wanted to see if they were honest, and they were.

But it's about variety and quality of food that count with our guys and gals. We feed a varied diet of meats, bones, chicken necks, raw food, BARF patties, dog soups and vegetables to our dogs. And with the birds, they both get fruit and vegetables in addition to organic baby food, grain mashes that we cook up along with mueslis or porridges, nuts both cracked to work at and hulled, a fresh seed mix that is not their primary diet and the occasional treat. We also feed cooked egg to the birds and raw ones to the dogs.

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But we have to share some concerns with you about some potentially serious contamination of food. Though we try to use organic fruit and vegetables, free range eggs and hormone and antibiotic free chicken, let's face it, we often don't know if they really are what they are labelled to be. And this is where the unseen ingredients or contaminants can cause severe problems. But they can be prevented.

Take our birds. In preparing fruit for them, we wash the fruit and where possible, peel them. Cherries and grapes for example aren't peeled but they need to be thoroughly washed because of pesticides, fungicides, the possibility of preservatives and fertiliser residue. We choose unwaxed apples, still peeling them and pears if fed to the animals for the same reason, to remove residuals. With lettuce, celery, carrots, leafy vegetables and the like, we rinse them thoroughly and have thought of using

grapefruit seed extract to clean them—which is readily available in the US but hard to find here.

There is a new problem now since so much of our fruits and vegetables are imported from either Asian countries where raw sewage and faeces are used to fertilise plants or South American countries where rampant use of pesticides before harvest and fungicides after for transport purposes are neither labelled or revealed. In the case of Asian vegetables for example, high bacterial and viral contamination has been uncovered to the point of being common. And our pets are sensitive to this and lack the immune system to counter a hefty dose from food sources.

Another area of concern is with poultry products. We routinely give our parrots cooked chicken bones—after all, in the wild, they're scavengers at the forest floor—and the dogs get raw chicken necks and even the odd raw carcass, but

never cooked bones. We tend to source our poultry from certified organic sources whenever possible, but our concerns about the safety of poultry may take these off the menu.

Recent tests on raw chicken in stores is uncovering more e-coli, listeria and salmonella infected meat and there is the added danger of antibiotics used in poultry farming creating even more virulent strains of these bacteria. Add to that the use of growth hormones and other substances and it's a gamble with your pet's health to feed them chicken.

That said, take your chances with the following recipe! Maybe think hard about what chicken to use.

Chicken Chips (for Fido)

- 2 cooked (boiled) chicken breasts
- 1 clove garlic
- 1/2 cup chicken broth
- 1 cup whole wheat flour - Can substitute rice flour for dogs prone to allergies
- 1/2 cup cornmeal

Method:

Puree chicken and garlic in a food processor or blender. Add in chicken broth. Transfer mixture to bowl and stir in remaining ingredients until it's not sticky anymore. Cut dough in half and shape each into a 3cm diameter roll-between a 10 or 20 cent piece. Wrap in plastic wrap and chill thoroughly.

Remove from refrigerator and slice into thin chips. Bake chips on lightly greased baking sheet at 180 degrees for 25-40 minutes, turning halfway through baking time. Chips will harden as they cool.

These make an excellent alternative to liver training treats. They're especially good for dogs who don't tolerate liver well. Store in an airtight zip lock bag for freshness.

Feline Fish Balls

- 1 250g can tuna in oil, drained
- 50g cooked sardines, skin removed
- 3 baby carrots, boiled until tender, mashed
- 1 egg, beaten
- 3 tablespoons grated cheese
- 2 tablespoons whole grain bread crumbs or rolled oats
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 2 teaspoons brewer's yeast *
- 1/4 teaspoon catnip

Method:

Combine all ingredients; mix well. Roll dough into 2cm balls and place balls 1 inch apart on a greased cookie sheet. Bake in a 180 degree C oven for 15-20 minutes, until golden brown and firm. Let cool on wire racks.

* Brewer's yeast is an excellent source of essential fatty acids and B-Complex vitamins for a glossy coat and stable nervous system.

Bagel Bird Feeder

- 1 day-old bagel (If you can get mini-bagels, use them!)
- peanut butter - preferably the type found in health food stores which is just ground up peanuts
- Birdseed
- Jute or string (for hanging)

Method:

Slice bagel down the middle and scoop most of the bread out. Spread entire bagel with peanut butter. Place birdseed on a paper plate. Roll the bagel in the birdseed. Tie jute or string through the hole of the bagel to hang the bagel. The birds can eat the whole thing!

A fun toy and tasty treat in one!



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